


LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP

Air University continues legacy of educating tomorrow's warriors

by Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates
photos by Staff Sgt. Brian Ferguson



At this school there are no pep rallies. No cheerleaders. No debate team. Its students do receive free professional and academic education. And when they aren't in class, some are off bombing stuff. The school is Air University. Airmen — enlisted, officers and civilians — make up the student body and it's their job to fight, fly and win whenever their nation calls. For this reason, the university has been developing leaders for more than 60 years, as the Air Force's intellectual and leadership center.

"This school gives Airmen the tools to be good leaders," said Dr. Bart Kessler, dean of distance learning for the Air Command and Staff College.

The university moved to Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, Ala., in late 1945. But the school has existed in one form or another since 1920. During most of those early years, the university's name was the Air Corps Tactical School. It developed advance doctrine and strategies for the relatively new concept of airpower.

The school closed just before World War II.

After undergoing restructuring, it re-opened as Air University on March 12, 1946 — a little more than one year before the Air Force became a separate service on Sept. 18, 1947.

“Air University is older than the Air Force,” said George Cully, a university historian.

A young Air Force took an infant Air University with it, seeing the potential for making education an integral part of the service. Today, the university teaches the doctrine Airmen developed over all those years. But it’s a process that changes along with the Air Force.



Providing direction is nothing new to Officer Training School instructor Tech. Sgt. Emilio Garza (left). The sergeant gives 1st Lt. John Toman last-minute pointers before his flight takes part in its graduation parade.

“In its early days, the vision was the university wouldn’t simply be a command and staff school, but that a range of educational opportunities would be offered to Airmen of all ranks and responsibilities,” Mr. Cully said.

More than six decades later, the vision is a reality. The university conducts professional military education, graduate education and professional continuing education for officers, enlisted personnel and civilians to prepare them for leadership and management responsibilities. In addition, the university provides pre-commissioning training, manages the College for Enlisted Professional Military Education — which includes the Air Force Senior Non-commissioned Officer Academy — and contributes to the development and testing of Air Force doctrine, concepts and strategy.

“A common misconception about AU is that it mainly educates officers,” academy commandant Chief Master Sgt. Pamela Derrow said. “The university actually provides education and training to Airmen of all ranks. The Air Force has invested a considerable amount of resources to ensure enlisted Airmen are well educated and battle ready.”

Today the university develops knowledgeable, technologically savvy and combat-capable Airmen, she said. That’s because education is a high priority for the Air Force.

“As the most technologically advanced military in the world, the [Air Force] must continue its investment in education if we are to maintain our superiority,” Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne said. “We need all Airmen to share a common understanding of history, doctrine and air and space power.”



Officer trainees listen to one of the many lectures they will attend before graduating from Officer Training School.

“Flickerball,” with its many, sometimes convoluted rules, is a game that helps Squadron Officer School students develop leadership skills.

At its heart, this is what Air University is all about — developing leaders, teaching doctrine and making air, space and cyberspace power a useable tool instead of a catchy phrase.

But while these ideas make up the university’s heart, its backbone is history. History surrounds — immerses — the campus. The spirit of Air Force pioneers still haunt its halls, not free to roam but contained in the black and white photographs and oil paintings that line the walls. They pose now as faces from the past who remind today’s students of the sacrifices made to shape the university and the Air Force.

Various statues also grace the campus. Stoic figures cast in bronze or carved from granite stand as silent sentinels pointing to a historic figure or moment. In one, the Wright Brothers’ monumental first flight stands frozen in mid-air, a phantom wind keeping forever alive the event that brought the Air Force into existence.

These images and statues are not simply idle tributes to a bygone era. They are an integral part of the university. From basic officer training to advanced courses, such as the Air War College, history is embedded in the doctrine and values taught.

In fact, history even has a hand in shaping the curriculum, Mr. Cully said.

“If you go back and look, after every war or conflict the Air Force has been involved in, new doctrine, methods and perspectives followed at Air University to reflect the lessons learned from those events,” Mr. Cully said.

It is this flexibility that allowed the university to grow into adulthood. At age 61, it has developed into a world-class institution that produces quality, knowledgeable Airmen — commissioned and noncommissioned alike — from the Air Force, sister services and foreign countries. But this didn’t happen overnight. It took many years and a constant re-thinking of the university’s identity.

“AU has always produced three things,” said Lt. Gen. Stephen Lorenz, the university commander. “These are students, faculty and ideas.”

One of the most significant of these ideas was the creation of the Community College of the Air Force. Established in 1972, it is a regionally accredited college that helps Airmen earn an associate’s degree in applied science by giving them academic credit for occupational training they receive while in the service. The college has grown in leaps and bounds and is now the largest community college in the world with more than 340,000 students. As of March



Medical readiness exercises are part of the training regimen for Air University students like (left to right) Capt. Samantha Corbin, 2nd Lt. Zack Kalinauskas and 2nd Lt. Melanie Meier.

The campus of Air University has many historical buildings and centers of learning, like the Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center library.



2007, the college has awarded nearly 300,000 associate of applied science degrees.

The school, working with Air Force voluntary education administrators, has just introduced an associate to baccalaureate cooperative program that lets enlisted Airmen transfer all their CCAF credits toward a bachelor's degree.

"These numbers speak to the high quality of Airmen who are in today's Air Force and the tremendous opportunity CCAF offers them," CCAF commandant Col. Thomas Klincar said.

There is nothing second-rate about a CCAF degree.

"CCAF offers world-class degree programs," the colonel said. That includes small class sizes, credentialed instructors and state-of-the art instructional systems. "These combine to offer degree programs without peer among community colleges."

Air Force leaders know smarter Airmen make a smarter force. And a smarter force is a more effective force, the colonel said.

General Lorenz said the Air Force's emphasis on education has "contributed to how we fight and win wars."

"That's one reason we value education so much in the Air Force," the general said. "The end effect we want to create is better warrior scholars and better educated Airmen who will make a difference in the world and the air and space fight.

"AU develops Airmen into critically thinking airpower advocates whose ideas can increase the 'intellectual throw weight' of our service in the joint fight," General Lorenz said.

To the Air Force, education is power, he said. This is a secret it doesn't keep to itself.

George McCarthy Jr., deputy director of international affairs and education, said, "Today's Airmen are part of a global war and they are consistently working hand in hand with sister services and international allies. This institution reflects this concept by including members of our fellow services and allies in several courses."

The result is a win-win situation. Air Force and other service students interact with and learn from each other. Military members from other nations better understand the Air Force and how it accomplishes its mission.

For the international students, this knowledge is priceless.

"The information I've learned here is invaluable," said Norwegian air force Maj. Arvid Halvorsen, who is attending the Air Command and Staff College. "I've learned more here in 10 months than in my 17 years in the military. If I am assigned to a joint command, I now feel better prepared to work with U.S. military personnel."

This is one of the university's key objectives — developing Airmen, NCOs, officers and civilians who can think, lead and fight in a joint environment.

Today, as in the past, Airmen are still flying, operating and developing state-of-the-art equipment and weapons. Educating these Airmen remains a high priority for Air Force leadership. Air University is their biggest tool to ensure this happens.

"And we will continue to emphasize educational opportunities for both officers and enlisted members," Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley said. "These educational opportunities provide a force of Airmen better equipped to think, brief, write and prevail in the 'globalized' world we're operating in today."

Air University is leading this educational push. It has evolved over the years to create a school of thought through which many great leaders have passed. It also has developed revolutionary doctrine and presented hundreds of thousands of degrees.

All this as its students are still dropping bombs and winning wars. ✈



The prop and wings symbolize Air University.

Plenty to choose from

Since its creation in 1946, Air University has evolved into one of the largest academic institutions in the nation. Today it serves more than 50,000 students in residence and more than 115,000 through distance learning each year.

The university has eight colleges and schools and a vast support infrastructure:

College for Enlisted Professional Military Education
Writes and develops course material for Airmen leadership schools and eight NCO academies, the Air Force Senior NCO Academy and the Chief Master Sergeant Leadership Course.

Air Force Officer Accession and Training Schools
Conducts pre-commissioning training for active and reserve officers, and includes Officer Training School and the Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Community College of the Air Force
The largest community college in the world, it allows Airmen to apply work experience toward college credit and an associate's degree in their Air Force specialty.

Squadron Officer College
Teaches the fundamentals of leadership to lieutenants and captains, and includes the Air and Space Basic Course and Squadron Officer School.

Air Command and Staff College
Where majors receive the intermediate developmental education necessary to be successful field-grade officers, as squadron commanders and staff officers.

Air War College
Conducts senior developmental education for lieutenant colonels and colonels chosen to be group or wing commanders or leaders at the air, joint and coalition staff levels.

College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research and Education
Conducts airpower research, teaches doctrine and demonstrates tactics through "war games."

Air Force Institute of Technology
Continuing education and advanced academic programs, including scientific and engineering, leading to technical master's and doctorate degrees; located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio.

Air Force Institute for Advanced Distributed Learning
Promotes and advances innovation through transformative technologies and processes and provides professional military education, career-broadening technical training and specialized courses, including career development courses.

Air University Library
Designated the Muir S. Fairchild Research Information Center (after AU's first commander). It is the Department of Defense's largest library, with more than 2.5 million items.

School of Advanced Air and Space Studies
An 11-month follow-on graduate school. This is for select graduates of intermediate-level DOD PME, producing critical-thinking air power strategists.